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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2008

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In Today's Papers

'Ergenekon' Gang Investigation Continues

All papers report over the weekend and today that a court charged five ultra-nationalists for plotting a series of bomb attacks and assassinations across Turkey. Papers report their aim was to topple the ruling AKP government in a military coup in 2009. The court decision follows the detentions of dozens of people last week after a police investigation into a far-right group known as 'Ergenekon.' Retired general Veli Kucuk, the accused ringleader of the gang, is accused of ordering the murders of Turkish Armenian editor Hrant Dink in Istanbul, three Christian Bible publishers in Malatya, and a Council of State (Danistay) high justice in Ankara. The organization is accused of bomb attacks against Cumhuriyet newspaper offices and the Association of Martyrs' Families Chapter in Diyarbakir. Reports indicate, the group was also making preparations to assassinate Prime Minister Erdogan, Islamist leader Fethullah Gulen, and Turkey's Nobel Prize Winner for Literature Orhan Pamuk. Mainstream Sabah claims the gang has raised funds through drug trafficking and the help of the German intelligence service, BND.

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes on Sunday that the Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate spokesperson, Sevgi Erenerol, who is in custody for alleged ties to Ergenekon, used the Patriarchate as a meeting center for Ergenekon leaders Veli Kucuk, Zekeriya Ozturk, Fikri Karadag, and Kemal Kerincsiz. Police found evidence linking the gang with the CIA, MOSSAD, and the German intelligence service BND, claims Yeni Safak. Leftist Taraf says the Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate "was established in 1922 to reduce the influence of the Istanbul-based Greek Orthodox Patriarchate" and the Patriarchate "has served as an instrument of Ergenekon."

AKP-MHP to Meet Monday on Headscarf Reforms

All papers report the ruling AKP and opposition MHP officials will

meet Monday to discuss a plan to allow women to wear headscarves in universities. AKP lawmaker Husnu Tuna, parliament's constitutional commission member, said over the weekend that after headscarf regulations were eased in universities, the ruling AKP would work to remove the headscarf bans for civil servants as well. Mainstream Hurriyet's Sunday edition reports that Prime Minister Erdogan asked his staff to make clear that the headscarf reforms would be applied only in universities, and that the reforms would not disrupt public order and morals. Sunday papers also report many high school students wore headscarves during exams in Ankara, Erzurum and Denizli last week. Mainstream papers comment the students were encouraged by the attitudes of the AKP government.

CHP leader Deniz Baykal warned Sunday that the reforms planned by the AKP might transform the headscarf into a uniform for state officials. Former Chief Prosecutor Sabih Kanadoglu said Turkey's top problem was not the headscarf, but the exploitation of religion for political purposes. "This process is moving toward a religious dictatorship regime," said Kanadoglu.

Monday papers report President Abdullah Gul, during a visit to Kayseri over the weekend, signaled he would favor a public referendum on the turban. Gul's remarks drew strong reactions, with CHP MP Mustafa Ozyurek saying "a referendum over the fundamentals of the republic would divide people." Former Chief Prosecutor Kanadoglu followed suit, saying "a referendum cannot be held on whether to bring a Sharia regime to Turkey."

Mainstream Hurriyet expects a package of constitutional reforms to be submitted to the parliament this week if the AKP and MHP reach a compromise on the headscarf question.

Passenger Train Derails, Nine Killed

All papers report nine people were killed and at least 30 injured when a train jumped the tracks on Sunday in Denizli province in western Turkey. Passengers were stuck under the wreckage for as

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many as 12 hours. Initial investigations say the wreck could have been caused by a broken train track. The train was traveling from Istanbul to Denizli with more than 400 people on board. Thirty-nine people were killed in 2004 when a high-speed train between Ankara and Istanbul derailed.

Editorial Commentary: Turkey on or off Western Track; PM Erdogan on the West

Ali Aslan commented in Islamist-oriented Zaman (1/28): "PM Erdogan reacted harshly to the Democratic candidate Barack Obama's remarks on the Armenian issue last week. In a very active election atmosphere, all the candidates desperately need the support of all kinds of groups. Candidates' stances, usually, change once they enter the White House. During his election campaign, President Bush also promised support for the Armenian resolution, but his stance changed once he was elected. There was no need, at this point, for PM Erdogan to exaggerate this issue and react so harshly. Currently, the Armenian issue is shelved in the US Congress. It's very possible that the genocide draft will not pass the Congress. However, while the Armenian lobbies continuously pressure Congress, it should be Ankara's priority to intensively lobby on the Congress. Instead, unfortunately, the anti-Turkey gangs in Congress benefited from two of Ankara's recent mistakes. One of them was inviting Sudanese President Al-Bashir, who is accused of genocide in Darfur, to Turkey. The other mistake was PM Erdogan's remarks that no Israeli died in Israel from the rockets fired from Gaza. Luckily, The US media is heavily involved in the election campaign and the economic crisis, so they did not notice these two mistakes. Otherwise, Turkey's image in the US would be damaged heavily. Even though such acts seem to open doors for Turkey, they also damage Turkey's image in the West. Moreover, such acts allow the US and the EU to be skeptical about Turkey. Turkey should avoid these acts because they give the impression that Turkey has derailed from the Western route."

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet (1/28): "Since he was mayor of Istanbul, PM Erdogan has consistently shocked us all with his

remarks. His latest remarks are some of the worst. At the Education Ministry last week, Erdogan said to students preparing to travel to Europe, "we have adopted only the immoral acts of the West." As a matter of fact, there are two values we have adopted from the West which we cannot ignore. The first value is secularism, which is the basis of the republic. The second value is popular democracy, which we have to develop and advance continuously. It is natural for PM Erdogan to have problems with the principle of secularism; secularism stands against the values his party wants to force on the public. Nevertheless, he has to be grateful for the democratic system instead of the Sharia system, since the democratic system brought his party to power. PM Erdogan should clearly explain what he meant by his remarks regarding the western world's immoral acts and values. Otherwise, these words will increase suspicions about his political aims, both in Turkey and abroad."

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- On Sunday, Iran resumed gas exports to Turkey.
- The pro-Kurdish DTP deputy chairperson Emine Ayna said PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's proposal of a 'democratic confederation' in the region should be discussed as an alternative to the US Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA).
- 200 dead birds have been found in the southeastern province of Batman. The area has been quarantined in case the birds test positive for the H5N1 strain of avian flu.

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International News

- Javad Vaeedi, Deputy Head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said his country has produced 300 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF6) gas used for uranium enrichment in the Isfahan nuclear facility.
 - Prime Minister Olmert said Israel will resume the flow of humanitarian aid and fuel supplies to Gaza.
 - Russia's Election Commission has barred former Prime Minister and Kremlin critic Mikhail Kasyanov from the upcoming March presidential election.
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